II REPORT ON THE LABOR PARTY DEMAND IN QUEBEC

(From LSA/LSO Discusion Bulletin 12, 1972 Item 2)

NOTE: the following is the text of the report made by comrade A. Beiner, Quebec national organizer of the LSA/LSO, to a joint meeting of the Political Committee and the Quebec National Committee held on July 30, 1972. The general line of this report was adopted by the July 30 meeting and was subsequently adopted by the September 2-4 plenum of the Central Committee of the LSA/LSO.

On June 28, 1972 the Quebec LSO National Committee adopted the following motion after a discussion on the significance of the events of the May strike wave; the motion was to form part of a basis for the Quebec discussion in the preconvention discussion.

> "Motion to adopt the general line of the presentation according to which the massive entry of nationalist and unionized workers into the Parti Québécois and the experience in the PQ will constitute the reformist experience which the NDP is in English-Canada; that after the entire recent experience of the strengthening of the PQ especially after the recent general strike, it's neither necessary nor realistic to predict or to propose another reformist experience for the masses behind the trade union bureaucracy in a labor party; that we can anticipate that independentist militants who become aware of the inability of the PQ to lead the national liberation struggle, will join the LSO directly; and that we should drop the demand for a mass labor party in favor of a bolder and more open activity and presentation of the LSO."

This motion to drop the demand for a labor party in Quebec from our program is wrong. The formation of a mass labor party today in Quebec constitutes a more burning objective necessity than ever. This was confirmed negatively in the recent spring general strike when 250,000 workers found themselves without a single spokesperson in the National Assembly and without a single national political party supporting their demands.

The formation of a political party of the working class is essential not only to win the most immediate problems of the Quebec working class, but even more to advance the national emancipation struggle of the Québécois nation.

No revolutionary party exists in Quebec today with substantial influence among the working masses nor has any mass working class political party of any kind been established in Quebec in the past. The trade unions, distinctive in tneir strength and combativity, are the mass organizations of the working class, and are coming into increasing conflict with the bourgeois state. Given these factors, independent class political action in Quebec today can only be posed in terms of the launching of a labor party based on the trade unions.

The motion adopted by the NC/LSO is wrong first of all in putting an equality sign between the NDP experience of the English-Canadian workers and the PQ experience ot the Québécois workers. Although the two parties are reformist, their qualitatively different class characters are such that the two experiences are not similar. In the NDP the English-Canadian working class participates in a party controlled and led by the leadership of their own economic organizations -- the trade unions. In such a party the leaders of the class are put to the test in political struggle before all the workers and before the entire population. Not only objectively,

but also subjectively, the PQ cannot replace the experience of a class party.

Secondly, the motion of the NC/LSO is wrong because it implies a priori that a labor party in Quebec would be reformist. This constitutes a revision of our established position on this subject, that is

> "Even though the orientation of the trade union and NDP leadership will play initially a leading role in the formation of this labor party, it is by no means predetermined that the party will be reformist. On the contrary the conditions surrounding its creation are of such a character as to assure that it has every possibility of developing a totally different direction...
>
> "There is every possibility that the party will reject the reformist course and set out in a revolutionary direction. . . " (p.p. 20 & 21, 1968 *Vive Le Quebec Libre*).

It goes without saying that we do not accept that a Quebec labor party must necessarily have a reformist program. The "labor party" formulation specifies what is fundamental for us -- its class character, leaving open the question of program. This formulation allows us to popularize the concept of independent labor political action, prerequisite for the victory of the Québécois revolution. If such a party is created, the LSO would do its best to get it to adopt a revolutionary transitional program.

Thirdly, the motion of the NC/LSO implies that we "propose" "reformist experiences" to the masses. This is obviously false. A reformist experience can prove to be unavoidable... we would recognize its existence without accepting it and do everything possible to help the masses overcome it as soon as possible. Our overall objective at all times is the building of a mass revolutionary party of the Leninist type.

The creation of a labor party, and the struggle to win it to a revolutionary program, will be positive steps in helping the masses to rid themselves of reformist illusions and advance towards the process of building a revolutionary party.

Fourthly, while it's possible and preferable that the Québécois masses come directly to the LSO after the PQ experiences, it is by no means certain. Regardless of what happens in the course of the class struggle in Quebec, it's neither realistic nor understandable to broad masses of Québécois to counterpose the LSO with its very limited forces as an alternative to the PQ. The demand for a labor party allows the LSO even more a "bolder and more open activity and presentation" by furnishing us with a lever able to introduce our concepts of labor political action, the revolutionary party and the Workers and Farmers government to the masses in an understandable way.

The labor party demand also poses a possible alternative to the PQ on the level of political parties, and thus forms a necessary part of our propagandistic approach to PQers.

There is no question that the PQ is stronger than ever following the general strike. The demand tor a labor party is therefore more abstract for the Québécois masses and more isolated, but remains objectively just as necessary for the victory of the Québécois revolution.

What we foresaw as necessary and what remains necessary after the experience of the spring strike wave is a modification of our tactical presentation of the demand tor a labor party so that it can be raised, sensitively, simply and in a concrete context. We do not anticipate its use agitationally in the next immediate period. But it is completely false to conclude from this observation of the level of consciousness of the Québécois masses tnat we must **drop** from our program that which constitutes an objective need because it is less understood by the masses or is

postponed by developments such as the PQ.

In 1970, in the document "For an Independent Socialist Quebec" we said: "...the **objective** forces propelling the trade-unions towards independent political action remain, even if the PQ detour has delayed their impact for an indefinite period of time," and "If the demand for a labor party retains its validity, its immediate perspective is however postponed." (p.p. 38 & 39, French version)

Trotsky explained in the discussions on the *Transitional Program*; "We have repeated many times that the scientific character ot our activity consists in the fact that we adapt our program not to political conjunctures or the thought or mood of the masses as this mood is today, but we adapt our program to the objective situation as it is represented by the economic class structure of society. The mentality can be backward, then the political task or the party is to bring the mentality into harmony with the objective facts, to make the workers understand theobjective task. But we cannot adapt the program to the backward mentality ot the workers; the mentality, the mood is a secondary factor -- the prime factor is the objective situation." (page l5 *Education for Socialists*)

In the above mentioned motion of the NC/LSO the method is false because we use subjective criteria to drop a part of our program which is objectively essential to resolve the national and social crisis in Quebec. Politically, the NC/LSQ motion constitutes a tactical adaptation of our program to the level ot consciousness of the masses now in the PQ, which is impermissable from the point of view of the objective needs of the national and class struggles.

For these reasons we must reverse the NC/LSQ decision and reaffirm the demand tor a labor party as part of our overall program.

Alain Beiner (National Secretary/LSO)